

The University of Chicago

AN ANALYSIS OF THE THOUGHT OF ALFRED
NORTH WHITEHEAD AND WILLIAM
ERNEST HOCKING CONCERNING
GOOD AND EVIL

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL IN
CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR
OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND ETHICS

1933

By
EDMUND JABEZ THOMPSON

Private Edition, Distributed by
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LIBRARIES
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

1935

The University of Chicago

AN ANALYSIS OF THE THOUGHT OF ALFRED
NORTH WHITEHEAD AND WILLIAM
ERNEST HOCKING CONCERNING
GOOD AND EVIL

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL IN
CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR
OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND ETHICS

1933

By
EDMUND JABEZ THOMPSON

Private Edition, Distributed by
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LIBRARIES
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

1935

and a field in which the Good and the Evil may work out their conflict. Once statements are made that involve this implication, no amount of argument or reasoning can evade or escape the consequences ensuing. From the outset the problem of good and evil then becomes one of saying what the good is and what the evil is. This may be a task of designating things that have no existence, but are merely adjectives erroneously used as nouns. Mr. Whitehead is guilty of this inaccurate use of the terms. He writes: "The nature of evil is that the characters of things are mutually obstructive."¹ What he should have said, I maintain, is: The characters of things which are mutually obstructive may be called evil. Mr. Whitehead writes: "Evil is positive and destructive; what is good is positive and creative."² I maintain he should say: Positive and destructive processes may be called evil ones; positive and creative processes may be called good ones. Or again he speaks of evil as "a purpose towards elimination."³ Here, I maintain, it would be more precise to describe a "purpose towards elimination" as being evil.

Mr. Hocking, also, uses the words good and evil both as nouns and as adjectives. At the same time, he maintains that evil does not have to be accepted as a finality, but will eventually be transmuted into something different.

"No man," he writes, "can be content to accept evil as finality: each must have his theory of evil, as a means of bringing that evil under the conception of the whole, and so--of disposing of it."⁴

In this passage evil is spoken of as a thing, at the same time

¹A. N. Whitehead, Process and Reality (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929) p. 517.

²A. N. Whitehead, Religion in the Making (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926) p. 96.

³*Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁴W. E. Hocking, The Meaning of God in Human Experience, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1912) p. 134.

regarded as something that can be disposed of in such a way that it is no longer evil. Again he writes, "Now no one can doubt that evil is evil..... Good and evil as the objects of experience are the least independent of all objects;....."¹ Here he is using the words definitely as nouns. The result of this is obvious; for, as a result, Mr. Hooking has to work out his theory for the transmutation of evil--a process which seems to me impossible if evil is a noun designating some specific thing. On the other hand, Mr. Hooking recognizes something very closely allied to what I have been maintaining in his discussion of "the reflexive turn." He writes,

It is the reflexive turn that makes the trouble and creates the disappointing illusion of finality. We have reached, in each case, a universally valid answer--but it is not an answer to our question: it is an irrelevant universal.²

In this case, he is not specifically writing about good and evil, but what he says is true if we use those terms as nouns: We search for evil and think we have found it, only to have it evade our grasp as it is transmuted in wider relationships, and the same holds true of good.

There is one use of the term "good" as a proper noun which may be justified, i.e., when we call God the good. But even here the term is really used as an adjective describing God. God may be described as that which makes for the actualization of the most comprehensive and mutually sustaining system of patterns, and therefore to describe God as the good is permissible. But even here it is important to keep in mind the fact that the word is an adjective and not a noun.

¹W. E. Hooking, Types of Philosophy, pp. 372, 373.

²W. E. Hooking, The Meaning of God in Human Experience, p. 195.

Good and evil, then, are not entities apart, they are terms to be applied to processes in accordance as those processes are mutually sustaining or mutually obstructive of the most comprehensive structure of harmony or systems of patterns or possibilities.

For the sake of exhibiting this thesis we shall discuss it as applied to the levels of matter, life, emotional life, and intellectual life. Such divisions are selected merely for convenience to enable us to make some general applications, not because we believe the divisions have any particular virtue.

At the level of matter, that arrangement of individual parts which is orderly, symmetrical, harmonious and unified may be called good. On the other hand, where there is disarray, lack of order, chaos, the adjective evil may be applied.

A pile of bricks just thrown together may be called evil as contrasted with another pile of bricks arranged so as to actualize an artistic pattern. The first pile may be said to be mutually sustaining in so far as the bricks cooperate with one another to make the pile; but in the second group the bricks do more than merely form a pile, they also bring into actuality a structure characterized by an artistic pattern.

Or take a miscellaneous heap of different shaped puzzle blocks. These may be left as a meaningless heap or they may be arranged so as to fit together forming a complete unit, with each block having its own unique part in completing the whole. Here again the second grouping of blocks may be called good as compared with the first unordered grouping.

Both these illustrations are comparatively simple. But the same principles may be applied to arrangements of matter from the simplest miscellaneous groupings to the most complicated and

intricate arrangements of material, such, for example, as the University of Chicago Chapel. Here stone, shape, color, symbolism, human experience through the centuries and many other elements are gathered up and actualized in one artistic pattern.

At this level, then, that is evil which tends to chaos; and that is good which tends to harmony, symmetry, and orderly arrangement in the direction of actualizing the most comprehensive system of possibilities, of patterns, or of eternal objects.

The next level of processes which we have selected for consideration is that characterized by life. At this level the processes of disease, mutilation and decay are evil, because they bring about the destruction of the processes of life. On the other hand, the processes which sustain good health, wholeness, organic soundness are designated good. The same principle as before is applied in order to use the adjectives good and evil effectively. Those processes which mutually sustain life at its highest levels and in its most comprehensive aspects are good; those which mitigate against this are evil.

It is quite possible to have a situation where disease or mutilation may be from the widest perspectives good rather than evil. For example, to counteract one particularly destructive type of disease, it may be advantageous for the health of the organism to introduce another type of disease. Or in certain cases in order to enable life to continue at all, mutilation is necessary as in surgical operations.

In every case the individual process is to be characterized not in itself, but according as it cooperates with the widest and most comprehensive system or systems of possibilities or patterns. Each individual process must cooperate to sustain to the greatest possible extent all other processes, but it is

recognized that a conflict may arise and must be dealt with in the interests of wider mutuality. The discordant note may support the more comprehensive harmony.

When the level of life has emerged a new set of considerations reaches back to effect the designation of the level of matter. Previously, we said order, symmetry and harmony were good at the level of matter; but once life has emerged, this new level must be sustained at its widest and most comprehensive extent also. The processes of matter may contribute to do this or they may result in interference, conflict and inhibition of life's processes. Once the new level has emerged, the processes of matter can only be called good in so far as they mutually sustain not only order, symmetry and harmony at their own level but also the whole new level of life in its most comprehensive aspects. By implication the emergence of a new level writes back new judgments of good and evil into the previous level or levels.

In distinguishing between emotional life and intellectual life, I do so, not because the two areas of life can be precisely separated, but because it seems to me that there is enough difference to justify discussion of each separately. I have used the words "emotional" and "intellectual" as adjectives descriptive of areas of life. Whether we have evidence enough to arrange these areas as consecutive levels of emergence is debatable; we cannot say with any degree of certainty that emotional life appears before mental or intellectual life. In experience matter, life, emotional life, and mental or intellectual life are fused and interfused almost inextricably. Leaving the question of sequence of levels aside here we shall discuss the area or level of emotional life first.

In the area of emotional life, warped, twisted and

repressed desires and impulses are evil. The interference and inner conflict which bring about frustration, suffering and chaos in the emotional life of the individual are well known in the field of psychology. Here a difference must be noted between warped, twisted meaningless repression and wholesome healthy self-control and discipline, where the individual is consciously aware and intelligently active about certain desires and impulses of his organism.

In this area of life, those processes are good which make for the wholesome expression or control of desires and impulses where such can be accomplished in the interests of larger and more comprehensive harmonies. There must be intelligent and meaningful control and discipline of all impulses and desires in the direction of mutuality with the desires and impulses of more and more comprehensive societies of individuals.

Take, for example, a desire to kill. If an individual gives expression to a desire to kill in his own family, he destroys the initial social grouping; if he kills his neighbor, he may be protecting his family but he is destroying the tribal society; if he kills a member of another tribe, he may be protecting his own tribe, but he is destroying the wider social life possible between groups of tribes; if he kills fighting for his nation, he is destroying the possibilities of international intercourse and mutuality. While it is possible to conceive of situations where killing, in any one of these situations, might be necessary in the interests of wider possibilities of harmony and mutuality; the point I am emphasizing is that the desire or impulse must be controlled and exhibited only as it does support and sustain human relationships in their richest and most comprehensive processes.

Again, at the level or in the area where life is characterized by mind or intelligence, those processes which make for irrationality or unintelligence, for conflict of ideas or of trains of ideas may be called evil. Those processes which make for rationality, for intelligence, for organization of ideas and trains of ideas so as to be mutually sustaining and harmonious may be called good. Processes which through conflict and confusion tend to break down mind or intellect or interfere with their growth and development are evil. Those that sustain mind or intellect in its growth and at its richest and most comprehensive aspect are good. Because of the mind's ability to envision the realm of possibilities or systems of patterns, or eternal objects, it becomes supremely important.

There is a multiplicity of possibilities extending beyond what is actualized in the past and what is being actualized in the present. This realm of possibilities extends like a great infinite pattern, a part of which will be worked out into actuality. Time itself, as also space, is an ingredient in this great multiplicity of possibilities.

This realm of possibilities does not wait on man's proof of its existence. Man is in actual contact with it at every moment of his life. Possibilities begin where actuality ends, and the point at which possibility is entering into actuality we call "the present." This realm of possibilities is eternal, unchanged and unchanging. Yet it has a dynamic aspect. By that I mean that it has an aspect which contributes to the activity of those phases of existence where there is interaction. The realm of possibilities constitutes a lure which directs and inspires the lives of men. It is like a great magnet held immovable, yet ever drawing man on because of its very nature.

Man by means of his mind is able to peer ahead into this realm. His mind cuts forward, as the headlight of a car cuts forward into the darkness of night, revealing a multitude of possible paths. According to the keenness of a man's mind and the sincere persistence of his effort is this realm of possibilities opened up to him. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you....." Once it is opened up, man's selection of the set of possibilities to be actualized must be made in the direction of maximum mutuality. That way lies the good life. The man having achieved that vision still has the task of actualizing the possibilities. Indeed, the double process is already proceeding: man's mind must peer ahead continually even as his actions and behaviour actualize possibilities and in doing so limit them. His vision of possibilities must forever keep ahead of his actualizing of them in the course of behaviour. An illustration may clarify the point. A boy during the years of high school is peering ahead into the realm of possibilities for his subsequent career. Some of the possibilities are: a career as a lawyer, a doctor, a professor, a minister and so on. According as the boy's mind is keen, active and persistent, he will add to this list of possible careers; thus opening up a wider and wider vision of the realm of possibilities relating to his own life. Having envisioned these possibilities, if the boy would follow the quest for the good life, his next task is to select that set of possibilities which he believes will make for maximum mutuality. Naturally his belief on this point may be mistaken at the outset. Probably he will have to make adjustments from time to time as his vision becomes clearer as to what the maximum mutuality is. Here it is necessary to remember that one's life is not only interdependent with all other human lives but is

rooted, supported and interdependent with all existence. What this boy's life is will contribute favourably or unfavourably to all else.

Now once the boy has made his selection as to what he will be, the set of possibilities selected constitutes an increasing lure for him. It becomes so potent that it already influences and directs much of his action. For example, the boy decides to become a doctor. He now goes out of his way to be friendly with the local doctor, takes new interest in cases of sickness, becomes interested in the hospital; even his reading is influenced, items about doctors and sickness attract his attention, medical books are coveted and read. His finance is affected because he is now considering the expense of a medical course. But above all else is the fact that the day on which he will receive the diploma of a doctor stands as a golden point in the realm of possibilities, which lures him on with a power that emanates energy to all areas of his present life. As time passes it sometimes happens that the lure of such a set of possibilities lessens. If such is the case the quest for the good life demands that the whole realm of possibilities be searched with renewed vigilance and if it be discovered that maximum mutuality is not supported by the present course of action adjustments must be made even at great cost and sacrifice. If a boy selected making money for his career and as time progressed discovered that money will not buy the most precious things of life--life, health, love, true friends for example--to go on devoting his life merely to making money would be disastrous to his personal life. And what makes for disintegration of personality does not make for maximum mutuality.

However, there is no doubt that a man might peer far into the realm of possibilities and select that set which would enable

him to exist in sheltered ease. Even a set of possibilities chosen with such a selfish and shortsighted aim will have some lure. But such a course can never support and sustain a life of wide and deep interests. The man will stagnate and fossilize. Nor can such a set of possibilities awaken that supreme devotion and love which offers its all to the object of worship. Here, I would say, is the one sin that can ruin a man: the conscious choice of the less comprehensive course of action; accepting a course of action that is selfish rather than mutually sustaining of the highest life of all.

Once our thesis is stated it is clear that vision of the possible patterns or systems of patterns is vitally important. Mr. Whitehead speaks of "conceptual prehensions." He writes, "A conceptual prehension is a direct vision of some possibility of good or evil--of some possibility as to how actualities may be definite."¹ By this he seems to mean the mind's grasp or vision of possible patterns which may be actualized by following certain modes of action or behaviour. Obviously, the clearer the mind's vision, the more adequate its grasp of what the possibilities are, the more comprehensive will be the system of patterns or possibilities available. Thus the most intelligent mind, the mind with the broadest and deepest understanding and grasp of possible systems of patterns to be actualized will be the one able to apply the terms good and evil most meticulously, precisely and effectively. It is not sufficient to have "blind belief," there must be mental striving to envision as well as energetic striving in physical activity. All the capacities and abilities of the human organism must be devoted to the task, and the part played by the mind is supremely important.

¹A. N. Whitehead, Process and Reality, p. 50.

Not only is the mind concerned with the welfare of mind, but the whole organization of matter and life upon which it depends for its very existence are its concern. All must be taken into consideration in deciding what is the good life. Once we come to the level of mental or intellectual life new judgments of good and evil may be written back into all other levels or areas of processes. But the fundamental principle remains the same: those processes which are most comprehensively mutually sustaining of all areas and all levels are good, and those processes which make for interference, obstruction, conflict and prevention of the most comprehensive mutuality are evil.

The position we have been maintaining is particularly applicable to the social life and development of man. Man finds himself in a social system where it is incumbent upon him to care for his own needs and welfare. The individual at the outset must have food and clothing or housing. There follows an increasing development of needs to be met as there proceeds the development of human personality to its fullest and richest. The individual must have exercise physical and mental: there appears a need for recreation and for social life among fellow humans. In addition to the food for physical needs, the individual must also have intellectual and spiritual nourishment if he is to reach anything like his fullest possibilities in relation to the life of mankind. Here, then, that individual may be called good who so cares for himself that he is able to achieve the fullest and richest possible development.

The individual, however, finds himself already in the midst of the family group. And the life and affairs of the individual are so interdependent with those of other members of that

family group that the welfare of each and every member becomes a matter of primary importance to the individual. If the parents have not food enough, it will not be long until they grow too weak to secure food for the children. If the parents have insufficient exercise and recreation, the constricting effects of this will make itself felt in the family relationships perhaps in bad tempers or in listless dispositions. If the parents do not obtain mental and spiritual nourishment, they will be impoverished as personalities in the environment contributing to the nourishment of the child. In this relationship, that individual may be called good who not only cares for his own welfare and fullest development, but who also carries on his whole life so as to enable every other member of the family group to reach the highest development possible in conjunction with the welfare of other individuals. This may mean, will mean, the sacrifice of individual interests for the interests of the group. And that family may be called good when all the members mutually sustain each other as they endeavour to attain the most comprehensive and richest life possible.

Again, the family finds itself in a larger social group, the community. In this community are other families engaged in a multitude of occupations and pursuits. There are tradesmen, garagemen, lawyers, teachers, doctors, ministers, etc., etc. And the various pursuits are followed by these folk because of human needs. This results in an increasing interdependence of human interests of all individuals in the community. In this wider community, that family may be called good which conducts its activities not only so as to sustain the welfare of all its members at the highest, but also so as to cooperate with all other families

so as to mutually sustain the total life of the community as it strives to attain the most comprehensive and richest possible life. There will be conflicts of interests of individuals and of families, but by intelligent selection and mutual consideration and cooperation it is possible to work out a course of action in which the interests shall be to the largest degree mutually sustaining. That community may be called good when all the members, individuals and families, mutually sustain each other as they strive to achieve the most comprehensive and richest possible life.

The community, too, finds itself one in a still larger group, the nation. In the nation are many other communities, each with its own particular interests and problems. But once again there is interdependence. And once again, it is necessary for the individual community to take into consideration the factors which make for the welfare of all other communities. Where conflict of interests arises there must be mutual consideration and cooperation. Here that community may be called good which conducts its activities not only so as to support all its individual members at their highest, but also so as to cooperate with all other communities so as to mutually sustain the total life of the nation as it strives to achieve the most comprehensive and richest possible life. And that nation may be called good when all the members mutually sustain each other as they endeavour to attain to the most comprehensive and richest life possible.

It remains to point out that the nation, too, is one in a still larger group, the world. In the world there are many other nations, all having their own particular interests and problems. In this area of internationalism that nation may be called good which conducts its activities not only so as to support the life

of all its constituent members at their highest, but also so as to cooperate with all other nations so as to sustain the total life of the world in its endeavour to achieve the most comprehensive and richest possible life. And it follows that that world may be called good when all its constituent members mutually sustain each other in the most comprehensive and richest system of possibilities of living.

To return to the individual and consider him in relation to the world we find that he must not only consider himself and his own welfare, he must think of the welfare of the family, the welfare of the community, the welfare of the nation and the welfare of the world. And the individual may be called good in so far as he organizes his own possibilities so as to cooperate with the interests and welfare of all in achieving the most comprehensive and mutually sustaining system of possibilities.

Thus it is no longer possible to call an individual good merely because he abstains from certain things or because he does not do certain things. Yet where abstinence and refusal to do certain things results in beneficial consequences to mankind they are good. But to be worthy of the adjective good a man must do, as well as refrain from doing. There is responsibility for gearing his life into the life of the world in such a way as to contribute to the goodness of the world's life. One cannot stand completely aloof from the life and activity of man and yet contribute to his welfare. It is incumbent on man to conduct his activities so as to cooperate in the achieving of the most comprehensive system of possibilities. And in this intelligent cooperation is at a premium. The most intelligent man will have the most comprehensive vision of the realm of possibilities, and if he can mobilize all his

energies to the actualizing of that vision he will be a good man.

Discussions of good and evil have always had difficulty because those terms seemed to be merely relative. What was good in one situation seemed to be evil in another. To cut a man's limb off would be called evil. But if there was an infection so that the man's life was endangered, to cut off a limb would be called good since it might be the means of saving his life. Standards of behaviour in various times and in various countries differ so, that it seemed to be a matter of time and place as to whether a mode of behaviour or conduct was good or evil. This seeming relativity of the terms good and evil has been responsible for a considerable amount of scepticism regarding their ultimate validity. It has been said that if what we call good today will be regarded as evil tomorrow, it is only a matter of opinion and taste. The tendency of many to speak of The Good was largely an effort to emphasise the fact that there was an absolute standard of good and evil underlying all discussion. But the mere capitalizing of the word did not clarify the conception of an absolute standard or indicate how or where it was to be found.

The thesis which we are maintaining not only recognizes the relativity of the terms good and evil, but also gives a reasonable account of them. Every process is to be judged in accordance as it sustains or obstructs the actualization of the most comprehensive system of possibilities. According to one's vision of this most comprehensive system will be his judgment of what processes are good and what evil. If his vision is limited, what he calls good may be easily perceived to be evil in the judgment of one with a larger vision. One man may say it is evil to amputate a man's limb in spite of the dangerous infection, because

he is unable to see that if the limb remains the man will die. Once his mental vision is increased so that he sees the wider area of possibilities, he, too, will say that it is good to amputate: that action supports a more comprehensive system of possibilities since it sustains the living processes of the patient.

The same thing is true of the various judgments of good and evil at various times and in various countries. A course of action is not good or evil simply because people are in the habit of saying so, but only in accordance as it mutually sustains or obstructs the most comprehensive system of possibilities. Some of the processes which are habitually called good may be quite definitely evil from a little clearer perspective of the areas of possibilities involved. This would be true of much superstition. The people believe the observance of certain rites and customs, based really on superstition, are good. As a matter of fact, the observance of these rites and customs may be a definite obstruction in the way of attaining a more comprehensive and richer system of life's possibilities. People of all times have been faced with the problems of living, questions as to procedure in an infinite number of situations. It was inevitable, then, that out of this mass of human experience, stretching back into the very dawn of human history, there should be precipitated methods of proceeding in certain recurrent situations which were found to be reasonably efficacious. And the results of this experience have been passed on from generation to generation through association, through the medium of language, and through common experiences. Succeeding generations modified what they received in assimilating and in transmitting it. Throughout the whole process the factor of intelligence has been at work in varying degrees. Consequently, it is to be expected that many modes of living,

many methods of procedure that the past has to offer to the present are the beneficial results of long experience. On the other hand, as the conditions of life change, many of these methods of procedure become obsolete through inefficiency, and these methods are sometimes passed on with almost as much certainty as the more efficacious methods.

Mr. Whitehead speaks of "conceptual realization in imagination from the unfathomable realm of possibilities"; Mr. Hocking speaks of the part "reflexion" plays in revealing larger and larger areas of "meaning." And both seem to imply that through the "vision" of "possibilities" individuals find the present illuminated, and its significance in some sense transformed. Whitehead, of course, recognizes the "massive experience" below the level of consciousness. But significant though that may be, it is with this conceptual realization that we are concerned. Hocking speaks of the transmutation of evil by reason of attaining larger perspectives. And this, too, has to do with the realization in imagination of larger areas of the realm of possibilities. It is here, it seems to me, that we have the crux of the matter. Intelligence, conscious awareness, conceptual realization in imagination, reflexion, the factor involved in these terms is the significant one to good living.

A consideration of our thesis as related to the teachings of Jesus elucidates some interesting data. We have been discussing the difficulty of so envisioning the realm of possibilities as to recognize the most comprehensive system, thus being able to distinguish between good processes and evil ones. In the Gospel according to Matthew, 13:24-30, Jesus tells a simple parable of the growing of wheat and tares together. Wheat represents what is good and tares represents what is evil. In this narrative when

the servants wish to go and destroy the tares the master says, "No; in destroying the tares you may destroy the wheat also. Let them both grow together until harvest time."

While it is not the main point of the parable, the inability of the servants to distinguish clearly between the good and the evil is the reason for not taking any drastic steps to destroy what seems to be evil, i.e., the tares. Even the wisest among men is not so wise as to be infallible in this regard. Multitudes of mistakes have been made through the centuries because of mans' inability to distinguish clearly between what is good and what is evil. We have emphasized the important place which intelligence has in this matter. But while it has been maintained that the man with the keenest conceptual realization in imagination of the realm of possibilities is the one to make the most adequate judgment as to what is good and what is evil, there is no guarantee that his conceptual realization will be adequate to the task: even he may fail. We are left in a precarious situation where even the best vision that we have may be insufficient. If such is the order of things, these facts must be faced honestly. We are driving along in the dark with the one headlight of conceptual realization to reveal to us the realm of possibilities ahead. If the beam of that headlight is too dim or has insufficient extension, that adds to our difficulty. But it is our only salvation despite its shortcomings. If we can make it burn brighter we shall have greater vision. The difficulty recognised by Jesus in the parable of the wheat and the tares, is one which weighs heavily upon mankind.

Perhaps no theme was more often on the lips of Jesus than consideration of the will of God. On the basis of our thesis, our definition of the will of God would be: the will of God is

to actualize the most comprehensive system of mutually sustaining possibilities. Can this position be harmonized with what Jesus taught and said concerning the will of God?

At the outset it must be recognized that the language and mental imagery of the first century A. D., were very different from those of today. Imagery that was quite at home in the intellectual atmosphere of those times is today obsolete. Jesus was speaking to folk who had little difficulty in thinking of a place, heaven, where God reigned supreme. Today, for those schooled in the atmosphere of modern scientific thought, such a conception is extremely difficult if not impossible. At the same time, this difference of intellectual atmosphere does not need to prevent us from attempting to harmonize the thought of Jesus with the position we have been maintaining.

In the Gospel of Mark, 3:35, a situation is described in which the immediate family of Jesus comes asking for him. Jesus took the occasion to ask the question, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And in answer to his own question he said, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

The family unit is regarded as a group working together for a common good. Each one cares about the welfare of every other, and for the welfare of the whole group. Jesus took the pattern of the ideal smaller group and carried it out in application to a larger area of human relationships. The ideal of loving cooperation found in the family group is applied to the larger group of those who are concerned to do the will of God. This larger cooperation in the doing of the will of God not only associates one with God but links up the individuals with one another in a common purpose. This larger purpose supports their own welfare, the welfare of all others in the group, and is in

harmony with and sustains the will of God. If our definition of the will of God be accepted, membership in this new brotherhood of mankind involves cooperation with all other members and with God in the actualizing of the most comprehensive system of mutually sustaining possibilities.

In the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, following a discussion of prayer, Jesus is reported to have given his disciples an exemplary prayer. Mr. E. J. Goodspeed translates that prayer as follows:

Our Father in heaven,
Your name be revered!
Your kingdom come!
Your will be done on earth as it is done in heaven!
Give us today bread for the day,
And forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors.
And do not subject us to temptation,
But save us from the evil one.¹

An examination of this prayer reveals that fully the first half consists of a statement of admiration of God together with an emphatic desire for His will to be supreme in all realms. The reason for being so passionate to have the will of God supreme everywhere seems to be because, where it is supreme, the very name of God is associated with deep and sincere joy. When God's will becomes supreme in any area of life it is accompanied by the most abiding satisfaction. Thus the very thought of that satisfying condition of things, where God's will is supreme, calls out our most profound admiration. It is as if Jesus had prayed: "O God the very thought of the abundantly satisfying condition of things where Thou art supreme demands my highest admiration. May your control extend to all areas of life!"

According to our definition, where the will of God succeeds there is actualized the most comprehensive system of

¹E. J. Goodspeed, The New Testament, p. 10.

mutually sustaining possibilities; and the processes which achieve this may be called good. That the very thought of that condition should draw a profound expression of admiration from Jesus, followed by the expression of a sincere desire that such a condition of things should be extended, clearly indicated that Jesus would apply the adjective good to it.

The prayer goes on to suggest that bread is necessary for our continuance: that is, the more simple processes must continue to sustain the more complex processes. And the statement regarding trespasses, embodies the thought that the elimination of obstruction through sacrifice of so-called individual rights for more comprehensive cooperation is to be followed rather than the rigid enforcement of individual rights which disregard the welfare of a more extensive society. The last sentence of the prayer asks for such support and guidance from God as will enable us to avoid evil. Thus, the second part of the prayer is a brief statement of how God's will is to be brought into human actions so as to incorporate them into that more comprehensive system with which His will is concerned.

So important was the conception of the supremacy of the will of God in Jesus' mind that on one occasion he is reported to have said, John 4:34, "My food is doing the will of him who has sent me....." His life was not governed by desires of his own but by the wishes of God with whom he was in complete accord.

And in John 7:17 he said, "My teaching is not my own; it comes from him who has sent me. Anyone who resolves to do his will will know whether my teaching comes from God, or originates with me." In other words, devotion to God's will on our part will reveal to us whether Jesus was in accord with God or not. If we have not discovered God's will we have no way of knowing whether

Jesus was governed by it or not.

Perhaps the most significant statements made by Jesus concerning the will of God are those made during the Gethsemane experience, because in this situation it was no matter of theory or teaching but a matter of life and freedom or painful, ignominious death amid circumstances appearing very like failure. The experience is reported, with minor differences, in all three Synoptic Gospels.¹ And undoubtedly it is the same occasion that is reported in each one. The salient features are identical.

Jesus saw clearly the consequences towards which his course of action was moving. But it was not too late yet to escape. The question raised in his mind seems to me to have been whether God's will was that he should proceed on a course that would end in Jesus' violent death in apparent failure, or should he slip away and continue his teaching and healing ministry. That there was a great deal of justification for the latter course will appear when we remember that Jesus was still a young man. Another twenty or thirty years of teaching and organization carried on by a vigorous mature man must surely have resulted in the extension of the work Jesus lived for. Both courses had favourable and unfavourable aspects. But the significant thing for us is that Jesus agonized in prayer in an endeavour to realize conceptually what the will of God was. That Jesus had his own wishes is clear. But these were to have no consideration except where they coincided with the will of God. Once God's will was clearly envisioned there seems to have been no question in Jesus' mind about following it. The agony of prayer was his soul-shaking effort to envision God's will at a time when circumstances were pressing

¹Matt., 26:36-46, Mark. 14:32-42 and Luke 22:39-46.

heavily for more consideration of his own desires and welfare. It is one thing to do the will of God when that coincides with our own desires and welfare; it is another matter when doing that will appears to mean partial or complete sacrifice of our own desires and welfare. Jesus faced this issue, and struggled through to a victorious outcome at a time when even his closest friends were favourable to an opposite course of action. It was the supreme test in his life whether he himself was strong enough to live out what he had taught. The strength and poise of his bearing, when he had struggled through to a decision, is an indication of how strong was his conviction regarding the course of action he must follow. From this time on there is no hesitation no vacillation, but a steady firm tread to the cross.

It is our position that when a man has, through intense effort, achieved a conceptual realization in imagination of the most comprehensive system of mutually sustaining possibilities he can make the kind of decision which will hold firm even in the face of death itself. He now knows the will of God. To the man who has achieved that vision there is no way out, even though it demand life itself. If he refuse to give life itself, then he is obstructing the ingression of the highest he knows. The conflict created in his own personality is destructive. Not only has he refused to sustain the actualization of the most comprehensive system of possibilities, but he has introduced obstruction within himself; salvation for himself as well as for the world can come only with the elimination of that obstruction. Notwithstanding the inevitability of this, a man may refuse; ever after there remains for him the knowledge of his refusal to support good processes.

Herein lies the truth of the saying of Jesus, Matthew 7:14, "But the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and few there are that find it."¹ There is no escape from the way of intense effort to know, which must be followed by action according to the knowledge discovered. Jesus followed the course of action revealed to him even though it took him to the cross. He believed he was following the will of God. But if that course led to his destruction how could such a course be mutually sustaining of the actualization of the most comprehensive system of possibilities? In the hours just before the crucifixion, the disciples and friends of Jesus would probably have answered that question by saying that it was not. But to us who see the dynamic and progressively increasing effect of Jesus' life on human life through some nineteen centuries, our answer is that it was sustaining of such a system. Had Jesus rejected the cross and gone back to Galilee to live out his life to a more natural end it is doubtful whether we should have heard much of him. Paul, who made the great contribution of taking the Christian message to the Jews of the Diaspora and to the Gentiles, says almost nothing of the earthly life of Jesus. It was the experiences associated with the crucifixion that seized and occupied Paul's mind. For it must be remembered that it was the impact of a life that could face and accept the cross that generated such emphatic and certain belief that Jesus still lived. No matter how much we of today prefer to talk about the earthly life, the teaching and example of Jesus, documentary evidence indicates that first century Christians were primarily concerned with the experiences associated with the cross, death, and life that could transcend death. This is not

¹E. J. Goodspeed, The New Testament, p. 12.

to say that we today must concentrate our minds upon that aspect of Jesus, since then the world has moved on, and it may be that emphasis on some other aspect of his life will result in the most valuable contribution to modern life. Perhaps the values that were emphasized in the message to the first century have been fairly well absorbed and that the needs of modern life will be satisfied by emphasis on other aspects of Jesus' life. Certainly it was the crucifixion and the generated belief in a life that could transcend death that carried the Christian message out into wider and wider areas of human life. And the centuries have witnessed to the fact that Jesus' course of action has sustained a most comprehensive system, if not the most comprehensive system, of mutually sustaining possibilities. Countless lives have been stimulated to more energetic and unselfish living, having been supported in their best endeavours by the influence emanating from Jesus' life and death. Despite controversies, despite differences of emphasis, despite attention to various aspects of Jesus' teaching and life, the fact remains that the impact of Jesus upon human life has been stupendous. An examination of the volume of literature produced about him bears out this statement. And it is my contention that that impact has been in the direction of supporting the most comprehensive system of mutually sustaining possibilities. Since the realm of possibilities has ingression into the realm of actualities only in the present, it is erroneous to expect that the impact of Jesus' life would transform the world immediately. The impact of his life supports the ingression of a progressively more comprehensive system of possibilities. It is like the working of leaven, which gradually permeates the

whole mass. Looking back from the present intellectual, moral and spiritual atmosphere we may condemn many things in the past. But at the times when such things occurred, it may be that the efforts of all the good forces were not sufficient to achieve anything better, and what they did achieve may have been a very considerable advance. The permeation of present day movements, which do not openly associate themselves with Christianity, by the principles of Jesus is an indication of how he contributes even where not recognized. The concern for the welfare of the suffering and needy which has always marked Christianity has begun to influence other religions to a similar concern for human welfare.

The fact that Jesus in accepting the cross makes a greater contribution than if he had taken a course which would have safeguarded his earthly life for a few more years brings us face to face with the realization that there is no guarantee that man's welfare and existence will coincide ultimately with the actualization of the most comprehensive system of possibilities. It may be that man will be sacrificed eventually, and that his contribution will be made in what Mr. Whitehead calls "objective immortality." But the realization that such sacrifice is made only where it supports something better brings about reconciliation. That sacrifice is not a waste.

In Matthew 5:8, Jesus is reported to have said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." An impure heart, I take it, would be one filled with passion, self-interest, jealousy, spite, anxiety, ambition, or some other form of self-concern. Obviously the mind that is occupied with these cannot be wholly guided and governed by the one principle of discovering

the most mutually sustaining system of possibilities and of actualizing them. If by "see" Jesus meant "understand" or "know," then seeing God depends upon the singleness of mind of our devotion to the discovery of his will. The one who knows God's will may be said to know God. On the basis of our definition of God's will the statement becomes clear. It emphasises the need for unselfish devotion to the quest for the most comprehensive system of possibilities, and states that purity of heart or singleness of mind will achieve that vision. The man who has a pure heart will "see" God.

There are a number of places in the Gospels in which Jesus discusses what may be called the abundant life. John 10: 10-11, where he says, "I have come to let them have life, and to let them have it in abundance. I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd will give his life for his sheep," is a conspicuous example of this. My definition of the abundant life would be, the life which actualized the most comprehensive system of possibilities; and I maintain that the processes which sustain such life are good. In the passage quoted Jesus says just that. First he says he came that they might have life in abundance, and then adds that a good shepherd will give his life in support of the life of his sheep, and concludes by saying that he, Jesus, is the good shepherd. That is what we have been saying. That life is good which sustains the most comprehensive system of possibilities, or which sustains the most abundant life in the most extensive area. Jesus uses the figure of speech of a shepherd and his sheep. The shepherd is good when he supports the abundant life of the sheep even at the cost of his own life. The concern for self is lost in a greater concern for a more comprehensive society, and

the individual who so sacrifices self is called good.

Two passages which probably are reports of the same discussion present another angle of the conception of the abundant life. These are Matthew 6:25-33 and Luke 12:22-31. Here Jesus discusses the physical needs of man and his concern to meet and satisfy them. He recognizes the place of these, but puts emphasis not upon the mere meeting of physical needs but upon discovering God's kingdom and God's righteousness. The importance of seeking God's kingdom is so great that it overshadows the problem of satisfying the physical needs. We have been maintaining that man, because of the quality of mind which characterizes him, was enabled to envision this realm of possibilities which is God's concern--God's kingdom, if you will--and that physical needs were to be met so that they supported the actualization of the most comprehensive system of mutually sustaining possibilities. This is our complicated way of saying what Jesus said in the passages referred to above. Abundant life does not consist in having superabundance of food and clothing and money, but in subordinating a sufficiency of these to the achieving of that enrichment of life that comes through mental, moral and spiritual achievement.

To return to the former passage, (John 10:10) Jesus did not come that men might have six loaves of bread and several suits of clothing where he had only had one before; but Jesus came that man might know the satisfaction, the sheer joy of Christ-like living, that man might know the joy of the abundant life of mental, moral and spiritual achievement. The abundant life was a thing of growth, and development and outreach, not a thing of mere increase of things such as food, clothing and money. A man's life

is abundant as it grows rich through the growth and development of his abilities and capacities. The abundant life is the most comprehensive life possible for the individual in harmony with the development of other lives and processes.

A great deal of criticism has been leveled at the results of the evangelistic method of bringing about conversion to the Christian way of life. The main points of this criticism have been that many of the converts did not "stick," and that in many cases conversion did not result in any very marked change in the moral and spiritual life of the individual. The purpose of most evangelistic campaigns was to bring the individual to the point of decision, to get him to decide for Christ. This was often accomplished with a considerable number of individuals. But according to our thesis, deciding to do the will of God is not sufficient to achieve a good life. The decision is only the turning point. There must follow training and developing of the mind that there may be a conceptual realization in imagination of what possibilities are available. He must know something of how the most comprehensive and mutually sustaining system is to be discovered and actualized. To get the individual to make the decision to live according to the will of God is only the first step. There must follow a revelation of what that will is, the individual must be given a period of guidance and instruction as to how God's will is to be discovered, and as to how we are to determine whether it is God's will or not. On the basis of our position regarding the terms good and evil, this can be done. Each individual has the means of measuring courses of action. And in Christian group associations, there can be that comparing and sharing of conceptual realizations which should safeguard against tendencies to

individualistic fanaticisms.

A good life is not one that has merely made certain decisions, but it is a life forged with striving amid difficulties out of the rough material of experiences following the initial decision to live a good life. It was here that the weakness of some evangelism lay. The decisions were made, but there was no adequate developing of the mind of the convert to envision the realm of possibilities; nor was he adequately instructed in methods for distinguishing good courses of action from evil courses. The convert was usually told he must be absolutely honest, absolutely pure, and absolutely unselfish, or something of that kind. And while such advice was spoken of as if it involved the highest idealism, it will hardly bear critical examination. A measure of self-concern is necessary for that self-respect which gives a proper dignity to a man. When a man is faced with the urges for sex expression surely it is wiser for him to think through the whole relationship of sex to his life, and map out for himself a course of action that will either lead to socially accepted ways of expression or else intelligent control. But when absolute purity is urged, it is generally meant that the very thought of sex must be banished from the mind. I maintain that this is shutting the eyes where they ought to be open at their widest. A good life is to be achieved when we strive to envision the realm of possibilities and select that system which sustains not only itself but is mutually sustaining of the most comprehensive system.

Much depends upon the individual's development, capacity and ability to grasp intellectually life in the broadest and deepest way, in its vastest perspectives and widest relationship. The degree of truth and error in our judgment depends largely upon

the development of the individual making the judgment. If he is highly developed the proportion of truth will tend to be greater. However, the development may be in the direction of specializing or expertness in some restricted field. Such development may be made by shutting out multitudes of factors and considerations in the interests of isolation. If so such an individual may show no increase in his ability to judge good and evil. If, however, he specializes in some limited field but is continually striving to relate his discoveries and experiences to wider and wider areas of life then his specializing may contribute to a development that will admit of a high type of judgment. Herein lies the difference between the bigoted, dogmatic technician and the cultured scientist. The former concentrates on his little portion of the world to the exclusion of all else, and he has a tendency to discount all except the field in which he works; his life is a progressive narrowing. The latter works just as intelligently and just as concentratedly in his field, but he also attempts to harmonize what he finds there with all life and to keep his perspective. The cultured scientist studies the actualized possibilities in a restricted field, but he does not stop there. He attempts to relate his understanding of those patterns to the larger and larger patterns or possibilities. In this way his vision is increased both in keenness and in scope, so far as an adequate understanding of life is concerned. But the bigoted technician so concentrates on the patterns of his particular field that he loses sight of all the multitude of impinging possibilities, and his power of judgment of good and evil is correspondingly weak.

Some minds are born with greater capacities for the sort

of thing we have been discussing, than others. But while this difference of innate ability is recognised, it in no way prevents each from using what ability he has to the fullest degree. This variation of degree of development will always leave the way open for conflict. It rests with the most able minds to order affairs so that conflict is eliminated to the greatest degree.

In a universe where the possibility of evil is a continuous accompanist of all systems of processes, and where progress is the dangerous advance along the borders of chaos, and where there is no guarantee that the next step will not lead to the obstruction of much that is good, the individual may well find enthusiasm in cooperating in such hazardous advance with such cosmic agencies as are sustaining that advance. And the experience and knowledge of support from the environing influences for his own best efforts, as measured by the standard we have suggested, may well stimulate him to even greater effort. This seems to me to be the heart of religion, that intelligent and creative living may be energized and sustained by the awareness of cosmic support working in the life of individuals.

The position which we have maintained that the possibility of that obstruction, which we call evil processes, may appear at almost any point leaves no opportunity for blaming anyone for it. It is there, and if we do not succeed in eliminating it we must suffer the consequences; there is no one to blame for it. Thus the nerve is out of the attitude of resentment for evil experienced, and the whole idea of revenge is left meaningless; there is simply nothing to be revenged upon. Acts with that motivation are simply doing what Jesus so aptly pointed out, adding to the

existing evil, adding to that which we wish to obliterate. It is as if a man were trapped in a room in which there is a fire slowly destroying the structure, and also a water sprinkler which is checking the fire by its steady outpouring. Now the man may do what he can to assist in the checking of the fire, or he may use his strength to obstruct the water and so aid the fire in its work. But if he takes the latter course he is not only impeding the water and aiding the fire but he is contributing to his own destruction. So with the man who conducts his life so as to aid the processes which obstruct. He not only impedes the good processes but he is achieving his own destruction too. In such passages as Matthew 13:42, 22:13, 25:46, at first thought one is inclined to accuse Jesus of preaching an unmerciful message; but in the light of what we have been saying it is tragically true. The sinner works for his own destruction, for it is the distinguishing mark of evil processes that they obstruct the actualization of the most comprehensive system of mutually sustaining possibilities. If evil processes succeed, they bring about their own annihilation in the end. Mr. Hocking quotes a Chinese proverb,¹ "I meet good with good, that good may be maintained; I meet evil with good that good may be created." The thought here is similar to that expressed by Jesus. To repay evil with evil is to add to the obstruction to our achieving a good life. It is as if the man in the burning room plucked a brand and lit other parts of the structure in order to get even with the fire. He is simply increasing it, and hastening his own destruction.

¹W. E. Hocking, The Meaning of God in Human Experience, p. 205.

Nor can man have any quarrel with God. God is doing his best; he can only do better as more come to cooperate with him. This inability in God does not justify our rejecting him, for there is no other as good. He is actively supporting the best possible program for us. Our only procedure is to cooperate with him in the tragically dangerous process of growth and development. God is supporting our best efforts to the full of his power. Sometimes his power is not enough to overcome the interference, conflict and chaos which appear. Where that is so it is useless to blame; there must be patient continuous effort to bring about that cooperation which will eliminate that interference, conflict and chaos. Tragedy lurks all along the way. There is no guarantee of success either for us or for God. And there is no guarantee that obstruction, conflict and chaos will ever be completely eliminated. We must patiently use all our capacities to achieve a tender cooperation with all processes for the actualization of the most comprehensive system of mutually sustaining possibilities. There is no other way.

